

## L O U N G E R.

[N<sup>o</sup> LVII.]

Saturday, March 4. 1786.

*Fortunate Senex.*

VIRG.

## To the Author of the L O U N G E R.

S I R,

THERE is nothing in which mankind have differed more than in the representations they have given of human life. One class of men describes it as full of happiness and enjoyment, as a path covered with flowers; another has presented us with descriptions which show nothing but disappointment and vexation, which represent life as a path strewed with thorns, as a vale of misery and tears. Truth perhaps lies somewhere in the middle between those two opinions: Men were not born only to be miserable; and yet complete happiness is not the lot of any one on this side the grave. Life is a chequered thing, a building of mosaic work, a road where flowers and thorns are both to be met with.

It has always however been my opinion, that as the giving amiable and fair pictures of life proceeds from a happier temperament of mind, than the inclination to delineate those of a gloomy kind; so the indulging of such views contributes much more to happiness and virtue than the opposite impressions of a darker and more dismal nature. To think well of, and have respect for ourselves and the world around us, is one step to virtue and benevolence; but this step cannot be gained by a person who has been taught to consider himself and every thing around him in a gloomy and an unfavourable light.

There is one period of life which authors have been at pains to picture differently, according as they have been accustomed to take favourable or unfavourable views of the world in general. Old age, that period to which all wish to arrive, and which it is the fate of few only to reach, has been described by one set of men, as of all situations the most comfortable, and the most gloomy; as the last stage of human infirmity and helplessness, from which nothing but death can relieve; and the misery of which is enhanced by the

dread of that very death, the only cure for all its woe. Another class of men have represented old age as one of the brightest periods of human life; as that period in which we may be said to enjoy life twice, having not only present comforts to enjoy, but all those of a life already past to reflect on. "*Fructus autem senectutis,*" says Tully, "*est ante partorum bonorum memoria et copia.*"

The person who now addresses you is in this latter period: and though the case of one individual can be of little use in confirming a general opinion; yet I may perhaps be allowed to tell you, that I have never tasted more happiness than I have done for the last years of my life.

I entered upon the world with a small patrimony; but by close attention to my profession, I was soon rendered superior to the fear of poverty; and have now retired from business with a fortune, though not large, yet fully adequate to all my wants, and which has been sufficient to rear a numerous family. My profession was such as led me to direct my labours to the immediate use and advantage of my fellow-creatures; and I would not forfeit, for any consideration, the pleasure which, in my present advanced period of life, I receive from recalling to my mind the persons to whom I think my labours have been of some advantage.

I married early a lady whose views of life were similar to my own; and though the first rapture of love was quickly over, it was succeeded by a calmer and less tumultuous affection, more happy on the whole, and which has increased with our increasing years. Our mutual habits, our mutual attachments, our fondness for our children, have made us for a long course of time more and more one, and every year rendered dearer that union so long ago formed. My eldest son is now cultivating that profession from which his father has retired. With what joy do I see his talents successful! with what satisfaction do I perceive him improving those lessons I have given him; and with the most engaging modesty advancing much farther than his father's genius entitled him to advance! This is indeed living twice! With great sincerity, and with hopes that they are prophetic of my situation, can I use those words of Morni, in the Poems of Ossian; "May the name of Morni be forgot among the people; may it only be said, behold the father of Gaul."

My youngest boy is less advanced, but of no less promising parts, nor less amiable dispositions than his brother.

I have four daughters, and I cannot speak of them but with emotions of gratitude. They are obliged to me, and to their excellent mother, for the education we have given them; but how amply  
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have they repaid that obligation! My eldest daughter, now many years married, was before her marriage my companion, and the help-mate of her mother. We used then to call her our little house-keeper. Her own merit, the good education she received, and the inducement of having for a wife the daughter of such a mother as my *Hortensia*, contributed to make her the wife of a very respectable man; and *Hortensia* and I now, with enraptured hearts, see her eldest child, our grand-daughter, holding the same station in her mother's family that her mother did in ours. After our eldest daughter's marriage, our second succeeded to her place, and she again, upon her marriage, was succeeded in her turn. Our youngest, *Maria*, is the only one now left to us; and, I think I may say it without vanity, is in no respect inferior to any of the family. Her affection to me seems to be quickened with my advance in life; and if I feel any of the infirmities of age, they are much more than counterbalanced by her delicate attention: methinks I would not wish to be younger and stouter than I am, at the expence of losing the assistances of my dear *Maria*.

It is our custom every Saturday evening to have a general family-party. At tea I have all my grandchildren round me; and the variety of gratifications I receive from this little society, it is impossible to describe. At supper, my son, my daughters, and their husbands, are with us; and my wife and I, I can assure you, cut no unrespectable figure, seated in our elbow chairs. Had I any grievances to complain of through the week, which indeed I have not, this night would fully compensate them.

Amidst the amusements which this evening's party affords, I must mention one, the pleasure which we receive from the perusal of your *Lounger*. My wife gets it regularly delivered her every morning about nine; but no one is allowed then to read it. She herself carefully deposits it in her scrutoire, and it is not produced till after supper. It is then brought upon the table, and is read by my *Maria*, who does it all justice in the reading. I am sure it would give you much delight to hear the conversation it occasions; the remarks which are made, without affectation and with perfect candour, upon the composition, the scenes it describes, the characters it represents, their similarity to other papers of the kind, and the like. Many things are said, which I am persuaded, if collected together, would afford matter for a number of papers. One thing I shall mention, which came from *Maria* last Saturday. She observed, that there were many of the papers which introduced unmarried men and women, and she proposed that we should make

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up matches between them. This gave occasion to a good deal of pleasantry, most of which I have forgot; but I remember that among other marriages it was proposed, that *Captain N.* should be married to *Miss Caustic*, though Maria grasping my hand, the tear half starting in her eye, objected to it, because it would be wrong to deprive the Colonel of his sister. With regard to your correspondent *Hortensius*, the youngest of my married daughters, looking at her husband with inexpressible good humour, said, that if she were not already tied, she believed she could have married him herself.

Another source of our entertainment in reading your papers is a suspicion which I see prevails in the company, that some of its members are your correspondents, and have written in the *Lounger*. This suspicion gives birth to many a joke; and it is diverting to see upon whom the conjecture of having written this or that paper falls, and the different devices which are thought of to discover where the truth lies. Little do they imagine that their old father is at this moment employed as your correspondent.

But I must conclude: I am afraid ere this you will have thought, that I have one quality of an old man about me, that of being a great talker. I shall only add, that if you think this account of a happy family worth your insertion, it will afford, on the evening of the Saturday on which it is published, a good deal of entertainment to the family-party I have described.

AURELIUS.

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I know not whether it be from vanity, or from some better motive, that I have given this letter to the public. I must own, that I have felt myself very sensibly gratified by the manner in which my papers are received in the family of Aurelius. It is to persons in the ordinary stations of life that the *Lounger* is addressed. The learned are perhaps above it; the vulgar, those who are employed in the servile offices of life, below it. But as long as I can give one half-hour's amusement, mixed perhaps with a little instruction, to such a family as that of Aurelius, it shall neither be the indifference of the learned, nor the neglect of the multitude, which shall induce me to discontinue my labours.

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